

Remarks at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina December 23, 1996

Thank you very much. Please sit down. Lieutenant General Wilhelm, Sergeant Major Wilson, Major General Howard, Major General Smith, members of the Camp Lejeune and Jacksonville community, my good friend Governor Hunt, Representative McHale, Representative-elect McIntyre, Mayor Choate, Chaplain. I also want to thank Chief Warrant Officer Anderson and the 2d Marine Division Band. Thank you all.

Lieutenant General Wilhelm was not quite right; one person here at least would have preferred to hear him speak—me. *[Laughter]* I've heard me speak before. And he spoke so well, even if briefly, that he said most of what I meant to say in fewer words.

He reminds me of the first speech I ever gave, 20 years ago, as a public official. It was at a Rotary Club installation banquet. And the banquet began at 6:30, and I was introduced to speak at 10. You know, it was one of those things—there were 500 people there; everyone was introduced except 3 people—they went home mad. Ten people spoke first, and the guy got up to introduce me, and he said, "We could stop now and have had a very nice evening." *[Laughter]* Now, he didn't mean that, but I knew how he felt.

Let me tell all of you, beginning with you, General Wilhelm, this day has been especially moving to me. When I got on the plane this morning, on Air Force One in Washington, flying down here with General Shalikashvili and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Brown and Navy Secretary Dalton, the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, and yes, General Krulak himself—*[laughter]*—I was looking forward to this day. But I have enjoyed it beyond my wildest expectations. I can't say it the way you do, but I would like to say at least hoo-rah—thank you very much.

I'm delighted to be here today to join you in the holiday season, to welcome back the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit and the 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, from their long deployments, and to make a few Christmas deliveries.

This year at the White House Hillary and I asked the staff, instead of giving us traditional Christmas gifts, instead to donate toys to Toys for Tots, founded by the Marine Corps Reserve

almost 50 years ago and represented here on the stage with me. Since then, Toys for Tots has become part of America's Christmas. It's brought holiday happiness to millions of children. And here in the Camp Lejeune-Jacksonville community you have set an outstanding example by collecting thousands of toys. Well, today we brought several sacks filled with toys from the White House to add to your efforts. I want to thank you for giving us the chance to do it. And I want to thank the members of my staff for representing all of us at Christmas in this special way.

Above all, I wanted to bring to Camp Lejeune some heartfelt thank-yous—first, to our men and women in uniform who put themselves on the line every day. You should know at Christmas-time that you do have the knowing and profound gratitude of all Americans. You are helping us to fulfill a sacred pledge—to keep our Nation the greatest force in the world for peace and freedom, for security and prosperity. Your service is helping America to remain the world's indispensable nation, to lead in this time of tremendous change all over the world in how people work and live, relate to each other, and relate to people far beyond their Nation's borders. Only the United States today, thanks largely to you, has the ability to lead the world in its advance of peace and freedom, in its advance of security and prosperity. We simply could not do it without the overwhelming superiority of Armed Forces which you represent.

America knows that you at Camp Lejeune are America's forces in readiness—forces like the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, whom I just met at the mess hall and who must stay on alert over Christmas so the rest of us can celebrate this holiday of peace in peace. In the last 18 months, three/eight has provided vital security for our embassies in Africa, supported the mission of giving democracy a new chance in Haiti, and performed the spectacular rescue of Captain Scott O'Grady in Bosnia. I am very, very proud of all of you.

After the battle of Iwo Jima, Admiral Nimitz said that among the marines who fought there, uncommon valor was a common virtue. Now, more than 50 years later, you still demonstrate

that high standard. We see that in units like the 24th MEU, which suffered such a tragedy when two helicopters collided last May, reminding all of us of the dangers of serving in the Armed Forces even in peacetime. The families of the victims are still in our thoughts and prayers, and today I salute Captain Walt Kulakowski and Major Chuck Johnson, who survived the crash, thank God. They're both fully recovered and are here with us now.

I know from my conversation with Colonel Natonski at the time how deeply those losses affected the 24th MEU and their extended family here at Camp Lejeune. Yet, despite the tragedy, you never lost a stride. You fulfilled your mission in the Mediterranean with the skill and discipline that is a hallmark of the Marines. And your replacement, the 26th MEU and Battalion Landing Team one/eight, are showing the same excellence even as we meet here today.

Because of these units' devotion to duty, our forces on the ground in Bosnia can now go forward with their important mission. They know, and as Commander in Chief I know, that if trouble strikes there, the Marines will be there. There is no better insurance policy than that.

As Lieutenant General Wilhelm said, this has been a good year for America. Throughout this year Camp Lejeune's marines and sailors and, indeed, all of our Armed Forces have advanced our Nation's interest and achieved a record of outstanding success. You have shown what is best about our country, the determination to stand up for freedom, to stand against oppression, the readiness to give a helping hand. Because of your example, people everywhere look to America for help and inspiration.

In the Persian Gulf, America's men and women in uniform tightened the straitjacket around a dangerous tyrant. And off the Taiwan Straits, they calmed a rising storm. Because of all you have accomplished, more people in this holiday season in places like Haiti and Bosnia and, indeed, all around the globe can look forward to the blessings of a more normal life in the new year. I thank you for the service that has made that possible, and your Nation thanks you for that service.

I want to give special thanks, too, today to our Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, General George Joulwan, for all the years of arduous service at home and untold years abroad and especially for his leading role in

bringing peace to Bosnia. Today General Joulwan is announcing his intent to retire from the United States Army next spring. I thank him for his extraordinary service to the Nation, and I wish him and Mrs. Joulwan well. He has served in the finest American tradition. [*Applause*] Thank you.

Finally, in this holiday season, as families come together all across our country, I want to say a special word of thanks to the families here. The burden of America's leadership in the world weighs heavily on the families of our men and women in uniform, as the families of marines who have just departed here for the Mediterranean and Okinawa know all too well. Our Nation asks a lot of our military families, long separations, uncertainty, living with danger.

I have visited our forces from Bosnia to the Middle East, from Haiti to the Korean DMZ, and all across our Nation. I have seen the strong backing our troops get from their loved ones, backing that is absolutely essential for them to do their jobs, to keep their families together, to raise their children with love and good values and discipline, and to build strong communities. In the best of times, providing that kind of support takes hard work and sacrifices. In other times, it can require even more.

This year in the Camp Lejeune and Jacksonville community, you have shown the strength to overcome real crises, one after the other. In May you had to pull together as one after the helicopter crash. You got the seabags packed and got your sailors and marines off on their mission. Then the mission on the homefront became even tougher than the one in the Mediterranean. First, Hurricane Bertha ripped up homes and trees, knocked out power, and turned North Carolina into a disaster area. No sooner had you cleaned up from that storm when Hurricane Fran arrived, packing stronger winds and causing even more damage. But with energy and resolve, with the special efforts of your Key Volunteers, you met these challenges well, and housed and fed those who couldn't go home, and put Lejeune back on its feet.

This time of year more than any other is a time of family and faith, of love and giving gifts. I thank the families here for the gifts they have given to America, to enable us to have a Marine Corps, a Navy, an Armed Forces that can serve as well as any in all of history.

For all of America, surely there is no greater gift at Christmastime than the peace and free-

dom we enjoy. Because you are standing watch, our Nation has the greatest freedom in history. Because you are there, we can grow stronger and everyone has the chance to make the most of his or her God-given abilities. Because you are standing watch, we can raise our children in freedom and give them their chance, too. Because you are standing watch, those children can sleep without fear and wake up to the kinds of holidays we are about to celebrate.

Day-in and day-out, your sacrifice makes all this possible. It is your gift to your country. For all your fellow Americans, in a very real sense you make every day Christmas. You have always been faithful to America, and America must always be faithful to you.

Thank you. *Semper Fi*. Happy holidays. God bless you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:48 p.m. at Goettge Memorial Fieldhouse. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Charles E. Wilhelm, USMC, Commander, Maj. Gen. Ray L. Smith, USMC, Deputy Commander, and Sgt. Maj. Albert S. Wilson, USMC, Marine Forces Atlantic; Maj. Gen. Patrick G. Howard, USMC, Commanding General, Camp Lejeune; Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina; Mayor Marvin Choate of Jacksonville, NC; Lt. Bern Nowack, USN, Chaplain, Battalion Landing Team, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines; Chief Warrant Officer Tommy L. Anderson, USMC, Director, 2d Marine Division Band; and Col. Richard Natonski, USMC, Commanding Officer, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Statement on the Retirement of General George A. Joulwan, USA *December 23, 1996*

Today Gen. George Joulwan, the Commander in Chief, U.S. European Command, and the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, announced that he plans to retire next spring, after 36 years of active duty service. I want to take this opportunity to commend this extraordinary soldier for his exemplary service to his Nation, particularly his role in building a new post-cold-war security structure in Europe.

His sound military advice on the use of military power to back U.S. diplomacy, his crucial role in shaping new security structures and partnerships, and his superlative leadership in implementing peace in Bosnia will ensure that the NATO alliance will remain the anchor of American engagement in Europe and the linchpin of transatlantic security. In Bosnia, a breakthrough was achieved when he married appropriate military power to diplomatic leadership. He seized this opportunity for peace which he had created, helped to broker a cease-fire, and then, through his command of the multinational force IFOR, he ensured a stable and secure

environment so that the parties had the confidence to carry out their obligations under the Dayton agreement.

As General Joulwan worked to bring peace to Bosnia, he also led the effort to transform NATO so that it could better address such conflicts and remain the guarantor of Europe's democracy and the central force for European stability. He was the architect of the adaptation of NATO to meet the new challenges of a changed world, enhancing its security through the Partnership For Peace program and by modernizing its command structure. His efforts have built a foundation for a Europe that is safe, secure, and democratic well into the 21st century.

General Joulwan's leadership and wise counsel will truly be missed in the senior decisionmaking ranks of our national security structure. Hillary and I join our NATO allies in wishing him the very best.